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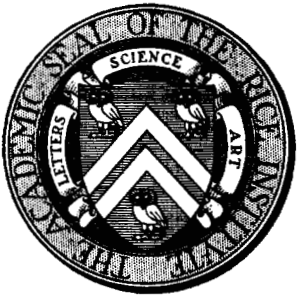

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PREFATORY NOTE

THESE three lectures were delivered at the Rice Institute on December 7, 8, and 9, 1943. The lectures were made possible, anonymously, by friends of the late Stockton Axson, and were intended as a memorial to that great teacher. Stockton Axson, with whom I was associated as pupil and colleague at Princeton University during the first decade of this century, was not only a great teacher but a man of delightful literary and personal culture, charming manners, and of the most chivalrous character. The gracious act of his friends reflects the high honor in which he was held in his community during the many years of his connection with the Rice Institute.

In this course of lectures, partly because of the seriousness of our time, a time when the minds of all of us are occupied with our country's cause and its affairs and when our armed forces have been sent to the ends of the earth on missions of life and death; and partly because my earlier experience enabled me to know how keenly the cultivated and gifted gentleman in whose honor these lectures were instituted was interested in the humanity of Shakespeare—because of these reasons, mainly, I have devoted these lectures to the moral aspects of Shakespeare's genius. I have not meant to neglect, still less to deprecate, the study of Shakespeare's art; but absorption in current interests made me wish to follow a different line.

I have had a growing conviction through the years that it is a mistake to regard Shakespeare primarily as an imitator of his predecessors in the drama and as a mere borrower

of the current thought of his age. It is far truer to regard him from his earliest appearance to the end of his dramatic career as an innovator and discoverer, not only of dramatic forms and effects, but of profound significances in human life; in other words, to think of him, as we think of Bacon, as an original thinker whose works are an apparently inexhaustible source of truth. These lectures were developed from the belief that Shakespeare was not so much an imitator of the works of others, not so much an unaccountable mystical force, as a leader of his age operating in normal fashion in the perfecting of his own art and that of Elizabethan drama. An earlier stage of this work is to be found in my paper, "Shakespeare's Development as a Dramatist in the Light of his Experience," published in *Studies in Philology,* Vol. XXXIX (1942), pp. 226–238.

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